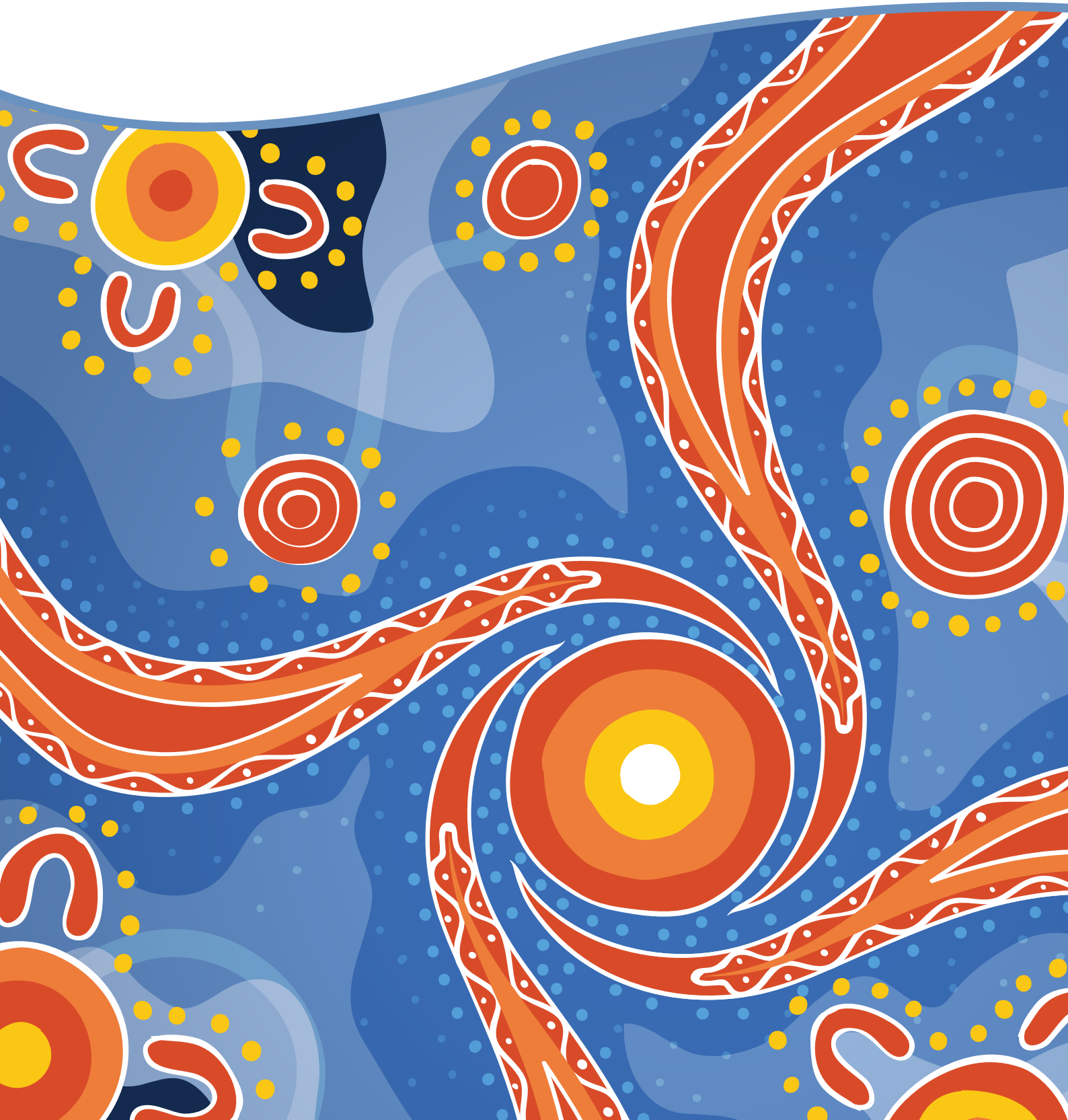




Government of South Australia
Health Performance Council

Post-implementation Review of Country Health SA's Aboriginal Community & Consumer Engagement Strategy

Health Performance Council, Government of South Australia



Post-implementation Review of Country Health SA's Aboriginal Community & Consumer Engagement Strategy — Community Edition

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The Health Performance Council (shown as the largest main meeting place) watches over the health and care journey of people to make sure that they are getting the proper care in every way. The journey paths emanating to and from the meeting place indicate the distance while the blue colour variations show the landscape types. Around the central meeting place are many communities. Yellow dots around these places keep the people safe through their journey, ensuring proper care is achieved for everybody and that their needs are properly met.



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Introduction

On behalf of South Australia's Health Performance Council, I am pleased to introduce this community edition of our report of our review of how well Country Health SA had implemented their *Aboriginal Community & Consumer Engagement Strategy*.

The Health Performance Council is South Australia's independent body that gives expert advice to the health minister on how well the state's health system is performing. Our advice focuses on health outcomes for the whole population and for specific population groups and we frequently report on health outcomes for Aboriginal people in South Australia.

Country Health SA – the government body that provided public hospital services outside the Adelaide area until June 2019 – published their *Aboriginal Community & Consumer Engagement Strategy* in May 2015 to help them, in their words, 'better plan, design, deliver and respond to the needs of Aboriginal people' who use country health services. Three and a half years later, we published our full technical report of our review into how well they had put that plan into practice. We also made an important commitment to produce a community-oriented edition of the report which I am delighted now to be introducing.

As public hospital services in country South Australia enter a fresh era of devolved local control by six new local health networks, I hope that our review report will help them put Aboriginal health at the heart of their community engagement strategies, to help them fill gaps, build on strengths and make for the best outcomes for Aboriginal health services users in country South Australia.

This review was made possible by the contributions of so many others. I wish to acknowledge and express my gratitude to all the members of our review advisory group, respondents to our surveys, participants in our focus groups, and all others who gave so generously of their time, knowledge and experience.

Thank you,

Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver AM

Health Performance Council

Disclaimer

The Health Performance Council's full report of the post-implementation review of Country Health SA's Aboriginal Community & Consumer Engagement Strategy is available from our website at <https://www.hpcs.com.au/reports/post-implementation-review-of-country-health-sas-aboriginal-community-and-consumer-engagement-strategy> and is available in print or other formats on request to healthhealthperformancecouncil@sa.gov.au. This community edition is a shorter interpretation of the full report, created for the Council by an expert Aboriginal writer for the benefit of Aboriginal community members in country South Australia and is not intended to be taken as a definitive expression of the Council's views and opinions.



Findings of the review

The aim of the post-implementation review (the “Review”) is to evaluate the implementation in the short-term of Country Health SA Local Health Network’s Aboriginal Community & Consumer Engagement (ACCE) Strategy (the “Strategy”).

The Review has identified significant underachievement in all key areas. There is little evidence to support the expectation of the Strategy that relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal community members have (are) being built.

There is little evidence to support the expectation that the Strategy would act as a ‘philosophy change’ catalyst that leads to the valuing of Aboriginal consumer and community participation, and engagement. The Strategy expected philosophical shifts within directorates, programs and services. The necessary culture change has been either ill-equipped and/or resistant to the activities and programs of the Strategy.

At the broader network and system-wide levels, the Strategy has been unable to generate or influence reforms in community engagement with Aboriginal people. Compliance with national safety and quality standards has not been successful. Expected changes to practices and processes to improve service delivery in a culturally safe manner have not been achieved.

Findings in relation to the activities and processes of the Strategy

Strategy design

The Experts by Experience Register is unique in Australia, which makes it a ground-breaking model with the potential to be replicated and as it is well regarded by stakeholders overall.

There are, however, some weaknesses in the Strategy itself which has led to some ambiguity in what the intended results are of the successful implementation and does not outline targets for self-evaluation. Although it is stated that **‘[progress] will be reported against a three-point rating scale identified in the [National Safety and Quality Health Standards]’**, no evidence of any such reporting or evaluation was found. An effective evaluation would have been to be outcomes-based, not activity-based to ensure it reports as an instrument of actual change and improvement.

Awareness of the strategy

As a result of the Strategy, Aboriginal people reported feeling more confident with how they engage with their local Country Health SA providers and barriers between staff and communities have been somewhat dismantled since its implementation. There are opportunities however, for better communication about the Strategy for all staff, for external stakeholder organisations and for communities; not just that it exists, but what the intended outcomes are.

Support

The engagement-driven approach envisaged by the strategy to achieve co-designed and co-delivered services has not been implemented, despite the best intentions of the members of the Experts by Experience Register and the other activities created to design and deliver services. At the stakeholder consultations it was clear that community involvement and contributions were vital, yet many Aboriginal people do not feel that Country Health SA has been able to put the Strategy into practice.

It is clear that the different needs and desires of Aboriginal people are not sufficiently well understood by those working in Country Health SA, and the services are therefore unable to meet these needs, particularly in relation to young people, older people, and to meet the needs of Aboriginal Elders.

Participation in the strategy

The establishment of the Experts by Experience Register was one of the Strategy's objectives, and this objective has been met. While there is some understanding of the Register and how the Experts can be used as a mechanism for engagement, until it is fully understood by all staff across Country Health SA, it is unable to act as a force for collaboration between Country Health SA and its Aboriginal constituents to its full capacity for maximum impact. Thus, the strategic activities that ought to engage with the purpose of collaboration and empowerment are not doing so.

In addition to this lack of use of the Experts, the overall management of the Register has been insufficient, including not enough Experts recruited to the Register, and not enough attention has been paid to the ongoing needs of Experts on the Register including training needs, support and collaborative engagement to enhance the confidence of the Experts so that the benefits can be best realised.

Workforce issues

The Review has revealed shortcomings in the makeup of, and culture within the Country Health SA workforce, including poor progress against the Strategy's goal to embed the practices valuing Aboriginal participation in healthcare, and broad and deep cultural issues that need to be addressed.

Staff across Country Health SA did not necessarily understand the benefits of comprehensive engagement with Aboriginal consumers and community members. Effective governance structures need to be created and applied to ensure that engagement does not remain in the Strategy, but that it is implemented in a meaningful way.

In relation to workforce culture, despite a requirement that all staff complete Aboriginal cultural training, we could not find evidence that indicated the extent of training and compliance. Training rates and accurate data collection of training completed will be vital to increasing the knowledge, understanding, respect and skills to serve a region rich in Aboriginal culture. More recently, SA Health published its Aboriginal Cultural Learning Framework which can be used to inform an important part of this gap. Another gap that will need to be addressed to ensure the Strategy can be meaningfully implemented is the representative employment levels of Aboriginal staff across Country Health SA, particularly in the Eyre and Far North regions.

The response rate from staff for survey participation was lower than 1%, and sufficiently low enough to question the reasons for this. Coupled with the other findings in relation to workplace culture, Country Health SA should examine and address workforce and other factors that insufficiently value the health and related needs of Aboriginal people.

Partnerships

The Strategy has had less of an impact on external partnerships than it could have with opportunities not being developed to build strong, cooperative partnerships with external stakeholders to engage with Aboriginal consumers.

More decisions could be made at local community levels and therefore need to design their work in ways that enables this, such as by elevating the status of Aboriginal consumers and local organisations in the design and delivery of services.

Has the Strategy met its objectives?

The Strategy has had limited impact on influencing expected short-term changes. It is also clear that there are significant gaps in affecting changes in consumer and community engagement activities in the shorter-term. This review makes several recommendations and advisory remarks that are required to improve the chances of achieving the expected medium and longer-term outcomes.



Advice and recommendations in moving forward

Implementation of the Strategy has faced numerous challenges. Some these are likely to be rooted in the attitudes of some individual employees in relation to Aboriginal people. Other challenges are the apparent inertia in organisations, programs, and services provided to Aboriginal people in culturally safe ways. Broader, organisational cultural factors appear to be resistant to a willingness to engage, consult, be inclusive, and to develop meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal people and organisations with common interests in improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal South Australians.

Several recommendations and advisory remarks arising from this review are described below.

Make more effective use of the Aboriginal Experts by Experience register

- The Experts by Experience Register needs stronger governance and composition to allow members to be engaged in ways that suit their diverse expertise and interests.
- Country Health SA local health networks should maximise their Experts by Experience resource. They should ensure that Experts are engaged all levels of partnership, including greater collaboration and empowerment than is the case at present.
- There is a need for better understanding and use of the Register's database of areas of expertise, knowledge, and interests of Experts.
- Networks must meet the training needs of their Experts.
- Networks should grow, tailor, and induct new members of their Registers.

Take strategic action to respect regional diversity of Aboriginal people

- The new Country Health SA networks should recognise the diversity of the Aboriginal communities they serve.
- Engagement with Aboriginal communities is critical to the design and delivery of healthcare services.

Develop strategic partnerships with community and stakeholder organisations

- Strong working relationships between the local health networks and local community-based organisations are essential to ensure ownership of their care.
- The networks must build partnerships with external stakeholders, including the local Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations, to ensure that health services are co-designed and co-produced with local organisations.
- There is a need to provide education to board members, executives and all levels of staff within the local health networks on the benefits of developing effective partnerships

Identify and, as necessary, tackle any systemic racism and the actual or perceived tendency of staff to the disregard of Aboriginal issues

- Country Health SA and its successor local health networks must take immediate action to tackle a lack of Aboriginal cultural awareness amongst its staff.
- Measures should be taken to ensure that all staff complete initial and ongoing cultural learning, and executives should monitor and enforce compliance with this.
- The new health networks in country South Australia should undertake regular audits of workforce culture, including around Aboriginal cultural awareness and attitudes to human rights, reconciliation awareness and of levels of institutionalised racism.

Ensure proper Aboriginal workforce representation

- Networks must recruit more Aboriginal staff at all levels of the workforce in order to engage appropriately with Aboriginal consumers.
- Networks should make frequent and regular workforce culture audits to identify weaknesses and the potential for wider workforce culture improvement.
- Networks should ensure that recruitment processes are free from any systemic biases that could be barriers to recruitment of suitable Aboriginal candidates.

Embed a workforce culture that recognises and respects the benefits of community and consumer engagement

- Networks should maintain strong communication with all staff on the benefits of strong community and consumer engagement.
- Examples include dissemination of community and related events, and regular reminders of and education on the Aboriginal Experts by Experience Register (and of other such groups).

Establish binding agreements on Aboriginal community and consumer engagement

- There is a need for new local health networks in country South Australia to establish binding agreements on engagement between the state's central health infrastructure, all new health networks across SA, and their Aboriginal constituents.

Ensure that national standards are being complied with

- The new country health networks should embed and operationalise current and future national guidelines and targets, including the new safety and quality health standards that have been released since the Strategy was published.

Make regular evaluations of the Strategy's implementation

- The current and any successor Strategies must be evaluated on an ongoing basis
- The results of any evaluations should also be communicated with the community in ways that respect the differing needs of communities.



How the Review was undertaken

The aim of the post-implementation Review (the “Review”) is to evaluate the implementation in the short term of Country Health SA Local Health Network’s Aboriginal Community & Consumer Engagement (ACCE) Strategy (the “Strategy”).

The objectives of the review of the Strategy are to determine:

1. How successful has the Strategy been in influencing change in the short term?
2. What are the remaining gaps in consumer and community engagement activities that would be expected to achieve the Strategy’s stated aims in the short term?
3. What are the key and emerging areas for future focus that will improve the chances of achieving medium and long-term outcomes?

Matters endorsed by HPC as being within scope of the review included several key areas with predominant themes of effectiveness of the Strategy, whether the approach reflects best cultural and engagement processes, evidence that any advice received from Aboriginal people informed the delivery of health services, and governance and accountability for the Strategy.

The review of Country Health SA’s mainstream Community and Consumer Engagement Strategy, and Country Health SA’s Aboriginal engagement in Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands are not included in this review.

The review was initiated by HPC and overseen by two of its members and a Health Advisory Council member. An advisory group was convened and included several Aboriginal health services representatives including some members of the Aboriginal ‘Experts by Experience register’.

The review was overseen by the South Australian Department of Health and Wellbeing Human Research Ethics Committee to safeguard Aboriginal cultural protocols and data collection. The Aboriginal Health Council of SA’s Aboriginal Health Research Ethics Committee determined that it was not necessary for them to provide formal oversight of the review.

The review was informed by the advisory group and included:

1. A desktop review of documents and analysis of available data;
2. Surveys of Country Health SA staff, members of Country Health’s Aboriginal ‘Experts by Experience’ Register and other stakeholders; and
3. Focus group sessions with stakeholders.

