

KEY THINKERS FORUM

Briefing Paper

Key Thinkers Forum

Indigenous Ear Health

About Poche Centres for Indigenous Health

Poche Centres for Indigenous Health are an example of the power of partnership in achieving real change to contribute to closing the gap in life expectancy. Established and funded by philanthropists Greg Poche AO and Kay Van Norton Poche, Poche Centres seek to leverage the expertise within Universities to seek solutions that address complex health issues faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Poches have gifted more than \$50million dollars to Aboriginal health since 2008.

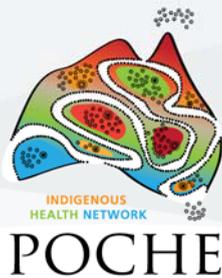
The Poche Indigenous Health Network

The Poche Indigenous Health Network was established to enhance the collaborative efforts, expertise and resources of each of the individual Poche Centres. The bi-annual *Key Thinkers Forum* represents a powerful example of this, providing an opportunity for all sectors of community, Government, non-government and academia to come together in critical discussion of significant issues within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public health at a national level.

Key Thinkers Forum Topic

This Key Thinkers Forum will consider the implications of Indigenous ear health and its effect on the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

This year the Poche Indigenous Health Network has collaborated with the *Poche Centre for Indigenous Health at The University of Sydney* and key community members to bring you this Key Thinkers Forum.



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Indigenous populations in Australia suffer a disproportionately high rate of hearing loss and its associated impact. The effects of this are far reaching. Beyond physical symptoms, it is felt socially and emotionally and can have lasting effects for one's whole life.

There are many possible reasons for the high rate, including: genetic causes, complications at birth, certain infectious diseases, chronic ear infections, use of certain medicines, injuries and accidents, exposure to loud noise, and ageing. The AIHW presents us with the following figures: *"In 2011, the rate of burden (measured using disability-adjusted life years—DALYs) from hearing loss in Indigenous children aged 0–14 was 12 times as high as for non-Indigenous children (69.4 and 5.6 DALYs per 1,000, respectively). Similarly, the rate of burden from otitis media in Indigenous children was 8.6 times as high as for non-Indigenous children (41.9 and 4.9 DALYs per 1,000, respectively)."*¹ This is really significant as it showcases just how devastating ear disease can be.

One of the major factors exacerbating hearing loss is that it may not be diagnosed. NACCHO refers to it as a "hidden or invisible issue"². The lack of transparency promotes ignorance of not only the issue but the effects of the issue. As we know, these are far reaching and can cause significant obstacles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in many areas.

Much research has been done into the effects. That research has allowed us to see that hearing loss and ear disease can be responsible for educational barriers, communication breakdown, mental health issues and over representation in the judicial system. These areas are fundamental to social and emotional wellbeing. They are fundamental to working and living and being well.

These factors are further complicated by areas of overlap and lack of clarity about the relationship between symptoms. An example of this is communication challenges leading to mental health issues. "Often neither the practitioner nor client are aware of this important factor influencing communication and presenting mental health problems. Cross cultural issues often contribute to this invisibility."³ A very different example is Aboriginal children displaying reduced immunity to vaccines⁴. The variety in these examples indicates the scope of these conditions.

There are exhaustive examples of what causes issues with ear health and there are exhaustive examples of how it effects those suffering. We are looking to change this picture.

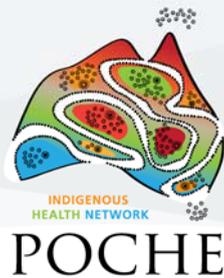
¹ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/12c11184-0c0a-43ad-8386-975c42c38105/aihw-aus-221-chapter-6-4.pdf.aspx>

² <https://nacchocommunique.com/category/ear-and-hearing/>

³ Howard D, Barney J (2018) Minced words: the importance of widespread hearing loss as an issue in the mental health of Indigenous Australians. Australian Indigenous Health Bulletin 18(1)

⁴ Australian Aboriginal children with otitis media have reduced antibody titres to specific nontypeable Haemophilus influenzae vaccine antigens Posted on: 6 March, 2017 Clinical and Vaccine Immunology Issue: Vol 17 No 1, January 2017 – March 2017

Thornton RB, Kirkham LS, Corscadden KJ, Wiertsema SP, Fuery A, Jones BJ, Coates HL, Vijayasekaran S, Zhang G, Keil A, Richmond PC (2017)



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We will be joined by a panel of practice experts and academics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ear Health to help us explore the topic.

Discussion Questions

1. What conditions are required to ensure the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?
2. Why are the rates of suffering not improving when we have known the disproportionate burden of disease for some time?
3. What are the most effective strategies for preventing and treating these issues?
4. Can traditional methods of treatment be integrated effectively into mainstream health services?

Details of the Key Thinkers Forum

Date: Tuesday, 6 August 2019

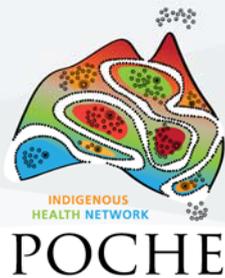
Time: 09.00am – 12.30pm

Panel Members:

- Carmen Parter
- Prof. Dennis McDermott
- Prof. Kelvin Kong
- Samantha Harkus

Facilitated by Prof. Tom Calma (AO)

Venue: Sydney Policy Lab, RD Watt Building, The University of Sydney, NSW 2006



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Further Information

At the conclusion of each Key Thinkers Forum, the Poche Network produces a paper that summarises the issues raised and makes comment or presents an opinion about the topic area discussed. It will be later published as a 'Poche Opinion paper'. Poche Opinions are a tool to contribute to knowledge and to draw the wider community into the key debates and issues in Aboriginal health.

Follow the link to find the Briefing papers and Poche Opinions from past events:
<http://pochehealth.edu.au/research/key-thinkers-forum/>

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